"The State of U.S.-Turkey Relations"

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, for the opportunity to appear before you today. The last three years have constituted perhaps the most troubled period in the history of the US-Turkish partnership, which dates to the end of World War II. Faced with the existential threat of world communism, the United States government announced in the Truman Doctrine that it would be its policy "to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures." Turkey responded to this American commitment, which was backed by serious and sustained military and economic assistance, by sending troops to Korea, and by housing alliance nuclear weapons on its soil.

Recently, however, misunderstandings and diplomatic missteps on both sides have caused some to question the enduring nature of this partnership. Many Turks point out that they are still faced with "subjugation by armed minorities," specifically the PKK terrorist group, whose members have taken sanctuary in American-supported northern Iraq. For their part, many

Americans argue that Turkey did not do its part to ensure the success of the US-led military alliance against Saddam Hussein. These disagreements, along with other issues, have led to an unprecedented degree of tension in this critical relationship that is in the interest of neither side.

Therefore I am honored to testify today before you on this important issue and to help put this tumultuous recent period into a broader context. To start, I would like reassert that the US-Turkey relationship is an indispensable partnership for both sides—and I truly hope that this hearing will provide an opportunity to restore a positive outlook for bilateral relations.

Turkey has proven to be a staunch ally of the United States as an important frontline state both before and after the Cold War. Turkish soldiers fought together with Americans in Korea, and have provided peacekeeping support in Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan. Though its role is perhaps overlooked today, NATO ally Turkey was a key supporter of the first Gulf War, even though its decision to do so resulted in serious harm to the Turkish economy. Turkey also helped Kurds in Iraq to avoid further persecution by backing American and British efforts to contain Saddam Hussein's military through the no-fly zone.

The US has in turn been Turkey's closest ally. The US has provided strong support to Turkey's EU membership bid, since a Turkish state firmly anchored in this institution will bring much-needed stability both to Turkey and to its neighborhood. The US has regularly helped Turkey when the country faced financial crisis, including a recent $10 billion loan package from the IMF. The US has also helped to develop a strategic East-West energy corridor for the transport of Caspian Sea oil and gas reserves to Western markets, which will ensure Turkish

energy security while making the country the focal point for regional economic and political development. The main leg of this corridor, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline from Azerbaijan to Turkey will begin loading oil on the 25th of this month. Few people now remember how closely the US and Turkey worked on this project during the mid to late 1990s. Unfortunately, few also remember other key achievements of this partnership, such as the US assistance in the arrest of Turkey's most wanted terrorist leader, PKK head Abdullah Ocalan. I would cite more examples—but the list is simply too long.

The question facing this committee today is this: what then changed that made people on both sides of the Atlantic question the importance and even the survivability of the relationship?

I believe the most important explanation lies in the nature of a partnership that was constructed within a Cold War framework, and that continued into the undefined period immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the mid-1990s, many people began to question whether the partnership would retain its strategic significance in light of an expected decline in NATO's importance. Though Turkey reasserted its place on the US strategic agenda with the advent of plans for the East-West energy corridor, throughout the 1990s the Turkish side continued to note with displeasure that bilateral relations remained too closely tied to military cooperation, with not enough emphasis placed on economic cooperation that would deepen the partnership.

Following the events of September 11, there was a historic chance to articulate a clear vision for this undefined partnership. An overwhelming majority of Turks were deeply saddened

by the attacks. Furthermore, people believed that the common experience of having suffered significant losses from terrorism would draw Turkey and the United States closer together. The Turkish government saw that it could make a significant contribution to the United States' developing war on terrorism. It rushed to send troops to Afghanistan, recognizing that Turkey could emerge—yet again—as the frontline state in the most important challenge of a generation. Furthermore, while sending troops to Afghanistan, it realized that this cooperation could take on other forms besides the strictly military. Indeed, Turkey hoped that the anti-terror campaign would make the US further appreciate the uniqueness of Turkish democracy and secularism in the context of its troubled neighborhood.

Unfortunately, this vision has not materialized to date. It has failed to do so for two critical reasons. First, there was during the Iraq war and its aftermath a misalignment of interests. Second, and equally importantly, Turkey and the United States failed to find a common language in which to promote the moderate Islamic values and traditions necessary as an alternative to the radical Islamist ideology.

The legacy of the diplomatic train wreck of 2003 is well-known by now. The American side took Turkish support of the war against Iraq for granted, and did not send a cabinet secretary to obtain their assistance. American officials chose instead to listen only to those who promised a yes vote from the Turkish parliament, and ignored the warning signs of impending rejection. A majority of Turks simply did not want to be associated with a war next door, especially when neither the Americans nor their own government could make a solid case for the war itself—and when neither side could articulate a coherent vision for an Iraq without Saddam Hussein. While

Turks were aware that Hussein was a criminal who had committed horrible acts, they recognized that a military campaign in Iraq was fraught with uncertainty. Turkish policymakers greatly feared the opening of a Pandora's box in Iraq, a country that was riven by deep-seated ethnic and religious rivalries, and which contained in its autonomous northern region the seed that could one day grow into an independent Kurdistan—a possibility that has been an anathema for Turkey.

With a new and inexperienced government in office that clashed with the traditional Turkish establishment, Turks were too disorganized to spell out their real opposition to the war**.** They instead chose to go through the motions of negotiations, with the result of the pre-war period taken up by bureaucratic quibbles on both sides. Instead of strategic discussions, months of tactical squabbles took place. Throughout this process, Turkish decision-makers made one critical miscalculation: that in the end, if they did not allow the US to open a northern front against Iraq, they would be able to stop the war.

None of the Turkish government officials, civil society representatives or business leaders with whom I spoke, even as recently as two weeks ago, had truly believed that the rewards promised by the Bush administration to Turkey in exchange for full cooperation in the Iraq war—financial contributions and a decision-making role equivalent to that played by the United Kingdom—would ever manifest themselves. In light of the difficulties experienced in Iraq after Saddam's fall—from initial lootings to attacks on mosques, to the continuing insurgency and the Abu Ghraib incidents—a majority of Turks continue to believe their government did the right thing by staying out of this complex situation. They never believed that

their views for post-war Iraq would have been given due consideration by the Americans and the British; furthermore, recognizing their country's difficult past with their Arab and Middle Eastern neighbors, Turks did not want to become once more a lightning rod for criticism. Instead, after the Turkish parliament's no vote, Turkey's legitimacy in the eyes of the Middle Easterners and the Europeans has increased to an unprecedented level.

However, this decision cost Turkey the support of its key domestic ally: the US military. The mistrust resulting from the decision has even led to incidents of American soldiers taking their Turkish counterparts into custody in northern Iraq. Lingering feelings of wariness seem also to be behind the military's failure thus far to fulfill the Bush administration's promise to confront the large PKK presence in northern Iraq. This may be one of the most acutely difficult issues existing between the US and Turkey today. In a recent trip to Turkey, when I asked whether there is one single thing the US can do to turn around the anti-Americanism in the country, the unequivocal answer was that America must contend with the PKK threat in Iraq. A senior Turkish government official frankly wondered whether the US thought it to be in the spirit of partnership to work with Turkey in capturing terrorists who target America, but not to even touch those who target America's partners? Many Turks hear the phrase "war on terror" and think "war on terror facing only America" As you can imagine, for the Turkish military, there is no more sensitive issue than that of the PKK, and now the Turkish military has lost its confidence in its counterpart as well.

Consequently, Turks tend to respond to President Bush's calls for freedom and democracy, as clearly expressed in his second inaugural address and in his recent visit to Tbilisi,

with skepticism and suspicion. They fear that, in the name of these two important principles, the US may attack Iran and Syria. They thus fail to recognize the nature of the historic, locally-produced change now underway in Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan and even Lebanon. To Turks concerned with the revival of the PKK in Iraq, the American pro-democracy agenda means instability along their borders—changes that occur without their involvement.

As I mentioned in recent testimony before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Turkey oscillates between feelings of insecurity about its waning influence in global politics and a sense of strategic indispensability.[1] Turkish leaders on the one hand are proud to be at the crossroads of many civilizations and cultures and want to be major geopolitical players—or at least, they want to have an impact in their immediate neighborhood. On the other hand, they get bogged down on ethnic and religious issues, such as the Kurdish or Turkmen concerns in Iraq, and thus are often perceived as unhelpful.

In addition to problems stemming from the Iraq war, there is a perhaps more fundamental issue standing in the way of repairing bilateral relations: that of moderate Islam. Turkey is a majority Muslim country, but since the foundation of the modern Turkish republic in 1923, it has set aside its religious identity in favor of one that is both democratic and secular. In their aspiration to enter the EU, many Turks want to be judged solely on technical criteria, leaving their Islamic identity out of the equation. In a country that chose as the blueprint for its republic the strict French model of *laicité*, many elites associate religiosity with backwardness, and secularism (both private and public) with modernity and progress. Yet, not all Turks share these

[1] US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations hearing on "The Future of Democracy in the Black Sea Area" March 8, 2005.

associations; many believe that the French model has outlived its usefulness, and is unable to fulfill the spiritual needs of the Turkish people. These people want to be welcomed by the EU and the US as at once democratic, secular, Western, and Muslim—and, as such, to be recognized as an inspiration to the rest of the Islamic world. For decades, the battles between the extremes of these two camps—between staunch secularists and religious fundamentalists—have raged onwards, at times even ending in military coups, as the Turkish armed forces have long seen themselves as the guardians of republican secularism.

Now, following 9/11, when America searched for Muslim allies, Turkey stood out as the most obvious and most promising one. For the United States, promoting Turkey as a country with "moderate Islamic" traditions made perfect sense. Indeed, I believe that on this basis, a truly meaningful US-Turkish strategic partnership can be built, one that would position Turkey once again as a frontline state in a new existential struggle. If this role is explained correctly, I am certain that a majority of Turks would agree.

However, incidences in which senior US officials have misspoken (with one labeling Turkey an "Islamic republic") have brought out the worst fears among Turks. Many genuinely believe that the US wants to "experiment" with creating a "moderate Islamic republic of Turkey" and therefore are strongly opposed to any US initiatives that highlight Islamic elements in Turkey. The administration's previous full embrace of the current Turkish prime minister, who has an Islamist past, certainly did not help assuage the concerns of the secularists in Turkey.

Yet, this is in my opinion the most important area for the future of the partnership. It is also the most delicate one. The US attempts thus far to win Muslim hearts and minds have not, to say the least, been a great success. Many in Turkey still remember year after year asking the US for help with preventing the spread of Wahhabi influence out of Turkey; until recently, however, the US did not consider this hate-filled ideology to be a threat. These Turkish thinkers fear that the US may again support a particular Islamic ideology in order to defeat the likes of Al Qaeda. In addition, due to what they see as America's lack of understanding of Islamic civilization and of issues important to contemporary Muslims of today, they fear that the US will only make matters worse. When I hear that the United States may lend its support to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, a group with a very radical ideology, I wonder as well.

Let me sum up my points and make some brief suggestions. Today there are problems in US-Turkish relations, but these have not as of yet turned into a deep anti-Americanism on the Turkish side. As this hearing demonstrates, there is also clear recognition of the importance of this relationship on the American side. During my recent trip, I heard from representatives of the Turkish government, the military, and civil society that they want to move beyond the Iraq war and its attendant mutual suspicions in order to discuss the formation of a new, healthier partnership. While some still deny there are problems in the relations, others have finally recognized that the negative mood vis-à-vis America could easily spiral out of control, and not only hurt Turkish economy but also Turkey's prospects with the EU. With this widespread recognition, there is a renewed interest in engagement with the United States.

This is good news, since the ball is indeed in the Turkish court. I would like to underline that the American side did not hold a grudge against Turkey following its refusal to allow US troops to transit Turkey and into Iraq in March 2003—even though this was the most important request the US has ever made of Turkey. In its continuing goodwill, less than two weeks after the no vote in the Turkish parliament, the Bush Administration, with your support in the House, even decided to allocate $1 billion to Turkey to assist its economy in case of negative effects of the war. I believe the mood in the US started to change only over the last year, following some very unhelpful remarks Turkish government officials and intellectuals made about the US.

Despite the intention to repair bilateral relations, however, the Turkish government cannot make lasting progress until the open wound of the PKK issue is healed. Of course, if Turkey did cooperate in Iraq, there would not be a PKK problem there today—the Turkish military more or less had a green light from the American side to deal with this threat. However, Turkish decision makers failed to foresee the longer-term implications of their non-cooperation, and are deeply humiliated both by their inability to stop the US from attacking Iraq, and even more so, by their irrelevance in the post-Saddam developments. Yet, if US-Turkey relations are going to be repaired, these mistakes need to be left with the historians, and the US, together with the Iraqi and Turkish governments, needs to come up with a solution to the PKK problem that is acceptable to all sides.

The US also needs to crystallize its vision and plan for engaging moderate Muslims, including in Turkey. Ideally, this should be done in close cooperation with Turkey, so that the US does not inadvertently worsen matters. For their part, the Turkish leadership and influential

opinion makers need to be more responsible and lead their people, rather than themselves being led by populism. If they believe in the US-Turkish partnership, they need to nurture this partnership and defend it.

One often hears of the great potential Turkey has, and I believe in this potential. Yet, I fear that the insecurities and sense of indispensability felt by many Turks are preventing this potential from being fully realized. The post-9/11 world is finally starting to take shape, and despite many mistakes, the US is emerging as the unquestionable leader of the free and democratic world. Having Turkey on its side would be very important for the US to fully succeed in this mission, and I hope with the efforts of the House, American political leaders and policy makers will redouble their efforts to reach out to Turkey. Having the US on its side is crucial for Turkey, and I hope Turkish political leaders and policy makers will make a genuine attempt at putting this relationship back on track.